

ATTACHMENT 19

Declaration of Hillary Quam (Aug. 15, 2023)

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	Civil Action No. 1:23-cv-00853-DAE
)	
v.)	
)	
GREG ABBOTT, in his capacity as GOVERNOR)	
OF THE STATE OF TEXAS, and THE STATE OF)	
TEXAS,)	
)	
Defendants.)	
)	

Declaration of Hillary Quam

I, Hillary Quam, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, and based upon my personal knowledge and information made known to me in the course of my employment, hereby make the following declaration:

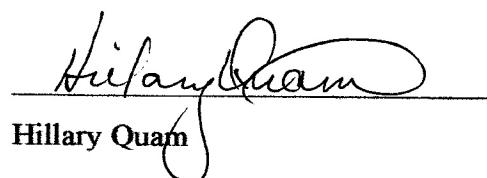
1. I am submitting this statement to supplement my declaration of July 24, 2023, with developments that have occurred since that date.
2. Since July 24, 2023, the continued presence of the floating barrier in the Rio Grande remains a subject of high-level diplomatic concern between Mexico and the United States.
3. The Government of Mexico has continued to protest to the United States the deployment of the barrier. On August 10, the Secretary of State held a meeting in Washington, D.C., with his counterpart from Mexico, Foreign Secretary Alicia Bárcena. Their joint press conference after the meeting was transcribed and publicly released by the Department of State. Exhibit A is a true and correct copy of this transcript. The topic of the floating

barrier was the first one raised by Foreign Secretary Bárcena. The Foreign Secretary indicated that Mexico is very concerned about the floating barrier and grateful for this lawsuit. She said that Mexico's demand is that the buoys be removed. She indicated that the action by Texas is causing problems along the border, not just affecting Texas. And she made clear Mexico's hope and expectation that the matter would be resolved in short order, in the course of the month of August, including through this lawsuit.

4. The President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, holds a daily press conference during which he has discussed the matter of the floating barrier on at least six occasions since July 25. In his remarks, he has made clear the importance of the barrier's prompt removal and the Mexican government's knowledge of and appreciation for this lawsuit.
5. I continue to believe that if the entire barrier is not removed expeditiously, its presence will become a major irritant in U.S.-Mexico relations and damage U.S. foreign policy.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

Executed this 15th day of August, 2023, in Honolulu, Hawaii.



Hillary Quam
Hillary Quam

EXHIBIT A



SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, good afternoon, everyone. It is a real pleasure to welcome Foreign Minister Bárcena to the State Department, to the United States, on her first visit in this capacity.

Alicia, thank you for – not just for being here, but thank you as always for the quality of our conversation, our exchange. And one of the things that I mentioned in our meeting is in the 30 or so years that I've been engaged in foreign policy and these issues, I don't think there's been a time when we've had stronger partnership and collaboration between Mexico and the United States, and that's at a time when the multiplicity of issues and their complexity is also greater than ever before. So it's something that we deeply value. And we've had the opportunity to speak on the phone several times since Alicia has taken on this post, but I'm so grateful for today and being able to spend time in person.

We covered a lot of ground in our meeting. Let me just touch on a few of the main issues. For us and for Mexico, the challenge of dealing with drugs and particularly now synthetic drugs is at the top of our respective agendas. Here in the United States, fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is the number-one killer of Americans between the ages of 18 and 49. That in and of itself puts it at the very top of the list of our priorities. It's taken a tremendous toll on a human basis; it's taken a tremendous toll on an economic basis. More than \$1.5 trillion in a single year, the cost of dealing with this epidemic. So it's a major priority for President Biden, a major priority for me. We're focused in the United States in dealing, of course, on the demand side and reducing it, on effective treatment, on helping people get what they need, and we've made progress there.

But it's by definition an international problem because when it comes to synthetic opioids and when it comes to fentanyl in particular, in many instances, the chemical precursors that go into making these drugs are made in one place, transferred to another, put together, and then come to the United States. So we have to deal with this on an international level. It's also profoundly, for all of us, a public health concern because it's affecting our communities in such profound ways.

So we talked about today how we can strengthen and deepen even more the already significant collaboration that we have on narcotics in general and synthetic opioids in particular. This progress has been achieved with the leadership of President López Obrador and President Biden over the last two and a half, almost three years, working together to disrupt illicit supply chains and curb the production and the distribution of, in this case, these precursors, many of which are legal and then get diverted into illegal use. Targeting organized crime and drug traffickers;

preventing and treating addiction, something we're both very focused on; and advancing our Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities that we established in 2022, including something else that feeds into this, which is arms trafficking, because we see the criminal enterprises and cartels being able, in some part, to do what they're doing and protect themselves because of weapons, guns that are coming from the United States into Mexico.

And finally, on this, we are very grateful for Mexico's participation in something that we established earlier this summer, and that is the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. We now have 85 countries who have signed on to take part in this. And this was not a one-off meeting of foreign ministers and other ministers. It's an organized collaboration among some 85 countries to work together on all aspects of the synthetic opioid problem to get a stronger grip on it and to deal with it more effectively.

I anticipate we'll have another meeting of this coalition on the margins of the UN General Assembly in just a few weeks. We have a work plan, Mexico is an integral part of this, and we very much welcome that collaboration.

Second, we focused on irregular migration as well as some regional challenges. You all know this, but it always bears repeating: We have historic record levels of migration going on around the world, more than a hundred million people on our planet on the move away from their homes; in our own hemisphere, well over 20 million people. So what we've determined to do is to work as a region to make migration more safe, more orderly, and more humane.

Just two weeks ago, President López Obrador was good enough to host the White House Homeland Security Advisor Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall as well as our Deputy Secretary of State Rich Verma. And they had a very productive meeting with Alicia that includes looking at a new initiative that we're working on to help refugees and vulnerable migrants in southern Mexico. This builds on a series of very successful efforts that we've made to build out legal pathways for those seeking to come to both of our countries. And this is hugely important because one of the things we know is this: If given the choice between coming to the United States legally or putting themselves in the hands of a trafficker, taking the incredibly hazardous journey to our border and then getting there and, of course, not – then not getting in, it's pretty clear what virtually everyone will choose.

So one of the things that we've been doing in answer to the challenge is to expand legal pathways. And some of the things that we've done have demonstrated very clear results, including the – for example, the parole program that involves Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, where we see numbers of those seeking asylum at our border go down significantly as a result of creating a legal pathway.

So we're working on all of this together. And in many ways, it flows from what we agreed in Los Angeles at the Summit of the Americas, where the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection established for the first time a sense of shared responsibility in the hemisphere: countries of origin, countries of transit, countries of destination. It is challenging work, but it is work that is producing results. And in this, our partnership with Mexico couldn't be more critical.

We also talked about, among many, an important regional challenge and that's Haiti. I want to commend first and foremost the decision of the Government of Kenya to now consider leading a multinational force in Haiti to help restore security and stability. That is in so many ways a necessary condition and probably even precondition for making real progress on restoring Haiti – Haiti's political track to elections and a new government as well as making sure we have an environment in which humanitarian assistance, for which the United States remains the number-one provider, as well as development assistance can get in.

So this is a very important step. We're now urging partners around the world to make clear that they're ready to participate to such a force. And I want to thank, among others, Jamaica and the Bahamas for standing up and making clear their willingness to do that. We're working on our own significant financial contribution, and we hope to carry this forward in the weeks ahead. It's the best way, we think, to get it helping re-establish security in Haiti and creating space for the country to move forward.

Finally, I just want to mention that we spent a little bit of time, but we – we know we're getting together in just over a month's time on our economic partnership. We have the High-Level Economic Dialogue coming up. We have been very focused at the instruction of President Biden and President López Obrador on regional integration, building resilient supply chains, manufacturing semi-conductors in North America.

When we have the High-Level Economic Dialogue next month, we're going to be focused on concrete ways we can advance that agenda; in particular, strengthening a skilled workforce,

which is vital to being able to do any of this, and bolstering regional semiconductor development. I think we – both Mexico and the United States see a tremendous opportunity in regional integration, everything that it can – it means for our economies, for opportunity, and for making sure that North America is at the forefront of the economy of the 21st century.

So we have a very busy agenda, and I think that's manifested by the fact that we'll have a High-Level Economic Dialogue, a High-Level Security Dialogue. We'll have the North American Leaders' Summit before the end of the year. We'll be together probably at APEC as well. And again, Alicia, I couldn't be more grateful for the collaboration, for the genuine partnership that our countries have, and for the pleasure of working with you.

Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: Well, thank you so much. I am very grateful for this opportunity, Dear Secretary Blinken, and to be here in this wonderful office. And I would – first of all, would like to tell you that I really believe we have an unprecedented relationship between Mexico and the United States. And if you allow me, let me now turn to Spanish, if you don't mind.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Please.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: Thank you so much.

(Via interpreter) Good afternoon, everyone. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Secretary Antony Blinken very warmly for his hospitality and graciousness for having invited me to come here to this wonderful office, and I think that we indeed did address many of the topics just raised by the Secretary. And I would like to refer to one in particular that we did have occasion to talk about, which is the matter of the buoys in Texas.

We are very much concerned about this topic and grateful that the Department of Justice of the United States has brought a suit against the government of Texas. This helps us tremendously because what we are talking about is a very delicate situation on the border, on the Rio Grande – Río Bravo, as we call it – but most of the buoys are on the Mexican side. The international commission of water borders on both sides has undertaken very important field work, and along with the suit that was brought by the Department of Justice, I think that we will be able to find a

solution for the time being. I take from this a sense of hope. Let's see what the federal court says and what could be done to address this and solve this matter in short order.

The second matter I would like to raise – I brought a personal letter from President Andrés López Obrador for President Joe Biden in which we recognize the enormous work that we are doing together, especially on a topic that is of concern. This was the first thing addressed by the Secretary, and I would just reiterate Mexico's commitment to work jointly on what I would call oversight or the – to address the supply chains of the production of synthetic drugs. I would recognize the work by Secretary Blinken because the global coalition to address synthetic drug threats held on July 7th that I was honored to take part in as my first working meeting in my new post – more than 80 countries took part, more than 20 different organizations.

This was a great idea, not just an idea, but regardless of what comes from it, the important thing that we have to achieve is to halt the – shut down these supply chains, and Mexico is thoroughly committed. And I brought to Secretary Blinken a proposal. It's not so much a proposal but a project, the integral substance – comprehensive substance system, which is a means to digitally monitor and oversee or monitor the entry of chemical precursors into Mexico – mostly to Mexico, of course – and to see where those precursors go, because certainly some of those precursors go to the pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies, and some are – go to illicit drug production.

So we're fully aware of how this is a top priority for the United States and Canada because we're losing our young people. This is a matter of public health. Without a doubt, this is an issue for which there needs to be global collaboration, not just collaboration between our countries.

I would also like to refer to what we talked about, about migration. Before that, on security, because we are going to have that meeting in Mexico on security and we will welcome Secretary Blinken October 5th. That'll be an honor for us – I think that's the date – and we will talk about this topic of security and something else that's dear to Mexico, which is weapons or firearms trafficking, another very important matter. It's the other side of the coin of organized crime. That means that we would enable us to – 200,000 weapons that are coming into Mexico per year, that we can get a handle on that and that we can really work together on that. And I think considerable progress has been made in the United States, for which we thank you for your commitment, because this is something that is truly very important to us.

Now, on the other topic that we have addressed, for which I am responsible, given a mandate issued by the Mexican president, which is the issue of migration, I think we have a wonderful opportunity. Legal channels have been opened, legal ways of ensuring safe, orderly, regular movement between our two countries such that has never existed before. We have to get that message out, and to say this to you and to have the media hear this now is very important, because humanitarian visas for 175,000 people have been achieved for Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua – 170,000 permits or visas under CBP One. We're talking about 140-some-thousand people who are now able to enter or have entered safely, orderly, humanely, regularly into the United States. That's of top importance. And, of course, there are some other worthwhile aspects that we've talked about – for example, temporary work permits, which is another topic, as well as student visas, and, of course, the one under the free trade agreement, which perhaps warrants being broadened to include some professions that the private sector is clamoring for.

But something else that's very worthwhile, and I want to refer to what Mexico is willing to do, which is to establish in the southeast of Mexico – which is where President López Obrador has told us we need to focus our efforts on – to create a place where, together with the UN and with the International Migration Organization and the refugees organization, for us to undertake an assessment, a preliminary assessment of those people who, after 42 – Title 42 was concluded, who are – who stayed behind in Mexico, people who can – whose eligibility can be assessed – that is, eligibility to come to the United States. Once that review is done by the UN agencies, then they can be sent to consular – or consular services can be sent to them to see which of them can come to the United States, and if they can't come here, then they can be integrated into Mexico.

And why the southeast? Because that's where President López Obrador has focused his attention on the Mayan Train plan and the corridor, the (inaudible) – the isthmus corridor. We don't want people continue putting their lives in jeopardy in the trip north; that's why we think the south is the best place for us to receive these people. Now, this is one of the overarching topics we've talked about, and I thank you for this because that we do indeed have a very fruitful dialogue that we need to continue.

Now, last but not least is the economic matter – how can we deepen the economic integration of our two countries and with Canada without a doubt. We are going to have this upcoming meeting of leaders in Canada, and I think we're going to be seeing a lot of each other. We'll see each other at the GA at the UN, then Mexico, then here once again – APEC – and I think our agenda is quite full, quite active, and I'm so pleased at that.

Now, why is this topic so important to us? Over the last six months, the secretary of the economy is publishing that trade between our two countries reached four hundred – 4 point – \$400 billion. So we're talking about considerable growth and expansion, and Mexico has become the first trade partner of the United States. And for us, that's, of course, important.

Something else that warrants underscoring is that with the reshoring or nearshoring, rather, Mexico, according to Inter-American Development Bank figures, we have captured 50 percent of that nearshoring effort. I'm sure the U.S. is aware of that. And this is indeed one of the most important topics. Why is this so important? It's important to the people because it creates economic opportunities, creates jobs. And today, figures were published in Mexico that were quite remarkable in which we see that, during this time period, there was a 5 million – a drop of – in poverty of 5 million people. That was published in the papers in Mexico today. That's very germane to what we're talking about, because everything we're doing ultimately is – will redound to the benefit of people. We work for the people.

And I don't want to leave out women – we are women and very much committed to helping women and families, and I think that's where our future lies.

Antony Blinken, dear Secretary, we will – the bicentennial framework, rather, where we will have many opportunities to strengthen ties between our peoples. And that – therein lies our strategic alliance. Thank you very much.

MR MILLER: First question today goes to Kylie Atwood with CNN.

QUESTION: Good afternoon.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Kylie.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Madam Foreign Secretary, I'll start with you as the visitor here. You mentioned that you brought a proposal to Secretary Blinken to digitally monitor the precursor chemicals coming into Mexico when it comes to synthetic drugs. When could that system actually go into place? And what are you asking in terms of the U.S.? Do you need resources to stand up that system? Just some more detail would be great.

Secretary Blinken, I'm going to focus on Iran with you. Has anyone in the U.S. Government had contact today with the five Americans who were imprisoned in Iran and have been moved to

house arrest? Can you give us any update as to how they are doing mentally and physically? And then there's a lot of questions about what is going to happen as part of this deal over the course of the next few weeks here. Iran is saying that there are five prisoners in the U.S. that are going to be released. Can you confirm that that is the case? When will they be released?

There's also – we've reported some conversations about the \$6 billion of Iranian funds in South Korea that will potentially move. When will those funds be moving? And why is the United States in a position where it's willing to give Iran easier access to those funds? And finally, are there any Americans who are still wrongfully detained in Iran, whether they be citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S.? Thank you.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Alicia?

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: Shall I start? Let me answer in English this time. Yes, we're putting together a strategy for the control of chemical precursors and the protection of health, and this is being done by the ministry of the navy, the army, basically, and the secretary of health, together with COFEPRIS, which is a regulatory agency. So the mission is to monitor, track, and locate in real time the regulated chemical substances that enter into Mexico, as well as to generate the database of the subjects, substances, quantities, and regulated activities that are carried out with them to guarantee the legal traceability.

Now, that doesn't mean in their point of origin, and we go from the point of origin to the end user and the consumption side. So that's the legal path. We also know that there's an illegal path, and that's also going to be monitored and traced. That's a little bit more difficult. But we're pulling together a system which is digitalized, and I think the aim – and when I say we are putting – as we speak – I mean, this is a system that is now being in certain way tested. But the most important thing is that in the ports of entry, basically in the in the coasts of Mexico, we have – they have established laboratories, specialized laboratories, to make sure that all this is carefully tracked because the precursors are chemicals that are difficult. And we started with four and we are in 72, I think, now – tracing 72 precursors because they change very rapidly. And then, of course, the transportation of these precursors is very tricky because they can be transported in very small quantities.

But – anyway, but what I want to say is yes, the system is being – I mean, we have a system already, but now the digital system is the one that is being now put forward. And the aim is to

have two points of entry only – legal entry – only two, one in the Pacific and one in the Atlantic. That's – I hope I answered your question.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Kylie, with regard to the five Americans who are being wrongfully detained in Iran, first, it's a positive step that they were released from prison and sent to home detention. But this is just the beginning of a process that I hope and expect will lead to their return home to the United States. As you've heard me say many times, I have no higher priority than looking out for the security, safety, and well-being of Americans around the world and, in particular, doing everything that we possibly can to bring home those who are being wrongfully detained in a number of countries, including in Iran.

In this case of the five, their detention in prison in many cases predates this administration, so it's been going on for a long time. One has been incarcerated wrongfully in Iran for eight years. So this is a positive step. But I don't want to get ahead of its conclusion because there is more work to be done to actually bring them home. My belief is that this is the beginning of the end of their nightmare and the nightmare that their families have experienced. I'm also not going to get into any of the details about what we're doing or engaged on because I don't want to jeopardize the completion of this process and the return home of our fellow citizens.

Let me be clear about a couple of things, though: In any event, in any respect, Iran will not be receiving any sanctions relief. And in any instance where we would engage in such efforts to bring Americans home from Iran, Iran's own funds would be used and transferred to restricted accounts such that the monies can only be used for humanitarian purposes, which, as you know, is permitted under our sanctions. There's an exemption for humanitarian that's there from the start.

We will continue to enforce all of our sanctions. We will continue to push back resolutely against Iran's destabilizing activities in the region and beyond, including now in supplying Russia with drones for its war of aggression against Ukraine. And none of these efforts take away from that. These are entirely separate tracks. We focused on getting our people home, but we continue to take strong action against Iran's other activities that we and so many other countries profoundly object to.

The State Department has been in contact with the five Americans. We spoke to them today. I think they're, needless to say, very happy to be out of prison, but we want to make sure that we

complete this process and bring them home to their families. I've spent a fair bit of time with the families over the last two and a half years. I know what this has meant to them: the separation from their loved ones, the questions every single day about their well-being, and the unanswered questions about when they'll come home. Well, now, we're on a track to do that, but we need to finish this process.

QUESTION: Any Americans still in Iranian prison?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I'm not aware of anyone beyond the five that we're talking about.

QUESTION: No U.S. permanent residents?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Again, I'm not – I'm not aware of any beyond the five of – American citizens.

MR MILLER: Next question goes to Jim Cason, *La Jornada*.

QUESTION: Thank you, both secretaries. I'm wondering about the buoys in the Rio Grande. And particularly, the U.S. Government has said they're illegal, the Mexican Government has said they're on – some of them are on Mexico's side. Why hasn't the U.S. Government just taken a step to have them removed from the river if they're on the U.S. side? And why hasn't the Mexican Government taken a step to remove them if they're on the Mexican side rather than let them sit there where they're obviously injuring lots of people?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: From my perspective, simply put, we're a country and a government that proceeds by rule of law. And in this case, the Department of Justice has gone to court to sue seeking two things: one, the removal of the buoys; two, an injunction against any further construction of buoys. So we need to let this legal process play out. Department of Justice can give you more detail on this, but that is the proper and appropriate way to proceed for a country that operates under the rule of law.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: (Via interpreter) Now, in the case of Mexico, we, of course, have agreements, the 1940 agreement, another – '70, 1970. We have a body called the International Committee on Borders and Waters on the Mexican side and U.S. side, and we are adhering to that procedure. Obviously, our petition, our demand is that these buoys be removed. We have already issued two diplomatic notes that have been received by the federal

government. This is an action on the part of a state government that obviously is causing problems that – along the border, not just affecting that state. So I hope to receive good news over the course of this month, and we will be further analyzing the situation. But this is one of the topics that we brought to this meeting.

MR MILLER: For the next question, Eduard Ribas with EFE.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you very much. First of all, with the Secretary, could you confirm that FBI is providing assistance to the investigation of the Ecuadorian candidate assassination?

And when you spoke with President Bazoum in Niger, what he told you? What are his feelings now?

(Via interpreter) (Inaudible) if you can give us more details about the migration center that Mexico is going to be open, and when would it open and where exactly will it be located?

And lastly, on the issue of Ecuador, if you are aware of any ties or have ties been confirmed with Sinaloan cartel?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you very much. With regard to the FBI in Ecuador, I'd really refer you to them. It's not for me to speak to that, so I'll let them speak to what they're doing or not doing.

With regard to President Bazoum and Niger, I spoke to him, I think most recently, the day before yesterday. I've spoken to him about half a dozen times since these military leaders came in, imprisoned him, and disrupted the constitutional order in Niger. We have deep concern for him, for his family, for his security and well-being. We've also made clear to the military leaders that we will hold them responsible for his safety and well-being. We talked at some length about the way forward in Niger, and we're both focused on the same thing, which is the restoration of the constitutional order.

Deputy Secretary of State Nuland, as you know, was just in Niger. She had an opportunity to speak directly to the military leaders who've undertaken this action and made clear to them the imperative of restoring constitutional order, as well as everything that's at risk if they don't. As significantly, ECOWAS, the organization that brings together West African countries, is playing a

lead role in making clear the imperative of the return to constitutional order, and we very much support ECOWAS's leadership and work on this.

Alicia.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: *Bueno.* (Via interpreter) I thank you for those two questions. The first one regarding what topics are we going to be addressing in that facility that we will be opening in the southeast of Mexico – there are a number of things we have to first define. First, this is to assist a defined population, four different nationalities: Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti, people who were left behind after the conclusion, the lifting of Title 42 – that is, who are still in Mexican territory.

Number two, this is temporary to solve these people's problem, and this is going to be a facility that will be operated, run by the International Migration Organization at the UN and the refugee – IMO. And they are going to conduct a prescreening, and once we know whether they are eligible, then we will make available – that is, U.S. consular service is going to then define, of that group, who will be allowed to come into the United States under working – work visa.

Those who cannot come to the United States, we will take charge of them in two ways. First, we will integrate them into our economy, and that's why we say the southeast because there are projects underway in which there is a need for labor, and we think that we can avail ourselves of that labor or the – insert them there. Now, what other opportunities can emerge from this? Another option is for them to go back to their countries, with the exception of Haiti.

As regards Ecuador, we are very much concerned, afflicted by what is happening there. President López Obrador already referred to that today. I spoke with the foreign minister of Ecuador to express our concern. The same thing happened to Mexico in 1984, in which one of the candidates, Donaldo Colosio, was killed. We know what they're going through right now – '94, rather – and we offered whatever support Ecuador requires of us.

MR MILLER: And the final question goes to Maria Molina with NTN24.

QUESTION: Thank you. So as we speak, these criminal groups are growing in the region, are working together in the region. In Ecuador, apparently the *Cártel de Sinaloa* had connections with the criminal group that had threatened Mr. Villavicencio. Also, Colombians were detained and

were captured after this murder. Like, what is your approach between the U.S. and Mexico to work as a region against these criminal groups?

And also, Secretary Blinken, these groups are also being fueled, financed by cocaine. And suddenly cocaine doesn't seem to be part of the picture anymore. It's like fentanyl is very important, but these groups are also being financed by cocaine. We don't even have satellite images of coca cultivation in Colombia or Peru or Bolivia anymore. So how are you working together against these groups?

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: Shall I? *Bueno.*

(Via interpreter) Thank you for that question. There is no evidence exactly what's happening in Ecuador. It's a bit early for us to make any type of assertion. What we do know is that the candidate Villavicencio had issued some statement during his campaign, but there is no proof, no evidence that points to that. We offered support, but there is no evidence; there is no proof.

Now, of course, we are collaborating – of course we are, because what we want is for there to be control over firearms and crime. Firearms and crime go hand in hand, and that's why we are collaborating on that.

And we're not only working on fentanyl in the case of Mexico. Well, that is today's problem given its death toll, but we're working on all other drugs, so heroin, cocaine, the illicit use of precursors. And what's happening with fentanyl is that this is a drug that is not produced by plants in natural means. This is a very complicated synthetic drug, and that opens up a whole new universe of things. We are collaborating in everywhere we can, so the matters of security are tied together. Yes, the supply chains for synthetic drugs and non-synthetic drugs, bringing that – reining that in, and, of course, the trafficking in weapons is something that also concerns us.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you. We have an enduring focus on other drugs, notably cocaine, heroin, as the minister said. That remains very much front and center in our focus and in the work that we're doing together with countries in the hemisphere, including, notably, Colombia, where we have a long record of working together effectively to deal with this.

When I was in Colombia meeting with President Petro, we confirmed – re-confirmed our focus, collaboration, which goes forward effectively to this day, to deal with drugs like cocaine and

heroin. And we have programs here at the State Department that continue day-in, day-out to reinforce the work that authorities are doing in countries, including in Colombia.

We have very strong collaboration between the United States and Mexico on trying to deal with the cartels themselves. And one of the things that we've seen is that some of these cartels are moving from plant-based drugs to synthetic drugs for a whole variety of reasons, not the least of which is that when you can do something in terms of producing a synthetic opioid in a room the size of this one and produce millions of pills, it – you can see how that can be an unfortunately very effective way of conducting your business. And given that what's smuggled is also pretty small in size, the incentives for some of these organizations moving into synthetic opioids are great.

So we have to deal with that. The United States has been the canary in the coal mine on synthetic opioids in our hemisphere. It happened here first. But unfortunately, we are not last. And so we see a significant increase in the use and deaths from fentanyl in a number of other countries in our hemisphere. And we see that these cartels are trying to make markets because our own market is now so saturated – in Europe, in Asia, and other places.

But again, this does not take away from the traditional focus, if you want to call it that, on other plant-based drugs. We have to and we are doing both. Alicia, of course, is exactly right about the importance of getting at every angle of this. One of those angles – and I mentioned this earlier – is on arms trafficking, illegal arms trafficking. And here, the United States is very conscious of the need to meet our responsibilities in working to curb that trafficking. We now have new laws in place that make trafficking across borders a federal crime. We have new authorities that we're using.

And what we've seen just in the last less than a year is a significant increase in investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and seizures. Seizures of firearms heading north to south just in the first quarter of Fiscal Year '23 have gone up by 65 percent. That is evidence of our commitment and also evidence of some results, but it's a massive challenge and one that we're at every day. And I agree with you that always looking for ways to strengthen collaboration, including among multiple countries, makes sense. It is something that we do, and we're always looking at ways to strengthen that collaboration.

Thank you.

MR MILLER: Thank you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Just one more on the issue of the arms trafficking.

MR MILLER: Thank you all.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: Can I just add one thing?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Please.

FOREIGN SECRETARY BÁRCENA: *Muy rápido.* (Via interpreter) We have to focus on the causes, the root causes. This is a public health problem, and we're also addressing it that way. I just wanted to add that and also to say that we are more than willing to collaborate on the matter of Haiti. So as soon as the UN resolution is issued, Mexico will speak to that.

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